Attachment to Amendment Number 0003
Questions and Answers to the RFP ED-IES-11-R-0036
For Regional Educational Laboratories 2012- 2017

The U.S. Department of Education is providing Amendment Number 0003, RFP EDIES-11-R-0036. This amendment includes:

1. Revised Performance Work Statement (PWS)
2. Revised Technical Proposal Instructions
3. Revised Business Proposal Instructions
4. Revised Section M -- Evaluation Criteria
5. Attachment C -- Pricing Schedule
6. Revised Attachment F – Past Performance Information Form (added correct fax number)
7. For Reference see Statistical Standards Table of Contents: http://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/stdtoc.asp
8. Amendment includes: Clause number 306-13 Government Furnished Property

The following are EDAR clause changes:

Section H:
Delete: 3452.208-70 Printing (AUG 1987)
Replace with : 3452.208-71 Printing (March 2011)

Delete 3452.227-71 Paperwork Reduction Act (AUG 1987)
Replace with: 3452.208-72 Paperwork Reduction Act (March 2011)

Section I:

Delete: 3452.209-70 Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCT 1987)
Replace with: 3452.209-71 Conflict of Interest (March 2011)

Add: 3452.215-70 Release of restricted data (March 2011)
Add: 3452.224-70 Release of information under the Freedom of Information Act

Delete: 3452.227-70 Publication and Publicity (AUG 1987)
Replace with: 3452.227-70 Publication and Publication (March 2011)

Delete: 3452.227-72 Advertising of Awards (AUG 1987)
Replace with: 3452.227-71 Advertising of Awards (March 2011)

Delete: 3452.237-71 Services of Consultants (AUG 1987)
Replace with 3452.237-70 Services of Consultants (March 2011)

Delete: 3452.202-1 Definitions-Department of Education (AUG 1987)
Replace: 3452.202-1 Definitions-Department of Education (March 2011)

Delete: 3452.242-70 Litigation and Claims (AUG 1987)
Replace: 3452.242-70 Litigation and Claims (March 2011)

Delete: 3452.242-73 Accessibility of Meetings, conferences, and seminars to persons with disabilities (AUG 1987)
Replace: 3452.242-73 Accessibility of Meetings, conferences, and seminars to persons with disabilities (March 2011)

9. Templates for spreadsheet # 1 and #2

Questions and Answers follow:

Formatting

1. The RFP states that the technical proposal must be double-spaced. Can text in tables and figures be single-spaced?

Text in tables, figures, charts, and other graphics may be single-spaced and in a font size not smaller than 8 point.

2. In addition to text, should tables be double spaced or may they be single spaced (as is the case in the IES publication style guide)?

Text in tables, figures, charts, and other graphics may be single-spaced and in a font size not smaller than 8 point.

3. Page 42 and 45 of 61, for readability, please confirm that it is acceptable for text in tables, figures, charts and other graphics to be single spaced and in a smaller, but legible font.

Text in tables, figures, charts, and other graphics may be single-spaced and in a font size not smaller than 8 point.

4. RFP Section L.9 Technical Proposal Instructions states "Technical proposals should be no more than 120 pages long, excluding appendices, double-sided, double-spaced with a 12-point font size and margins of at least one inch in a binder." Can graphics and tables included in the proposal be single-spaced with at least a 10 point font size?

Text in tables, figures, charts, and other graphics may be single-spaced and in a font size not smaller than 8 point.

5. On page 45 of the RFP, is the "Staffing and Management Plan" to be included in the 120 page limit for the technical proposal?

Offerors should provide a summary of the staffing and management plan in the text and include a clearly marked appendix with relevant detailed charts and tables. This appendix should be no more than 10 numbered pages.

6. Would ED consider specifying page limitations for the “Staffing and Management Plan” beyond the 120 page limit for the technical plan?

Offerors should provide a summary of the staffing and management plan in the text and include a clearly marked appendix with relevant detailed charts and tables. This appendix should be no more than 10 numbered pages.

7. Please confirm that Staffing and Management Plan for the REL proposal as well as the Optional Task 8 Proposal is excluded from the page limits.

Offerors should provide a summary of the staffing and management plan in the text and include a clearly marked appendix with relevant detailed charts and tables. This appendix should be no more than 10 numbered pages. As stated on page 45, offerors interested in submitting a proposal for Task 8 shall submit a separate stand-alone proposal. The technical proposal for Task 8 shall be no more than 25 pages excluding small business plan and appendices.

8. On page 45 of the RFP, as part of the “Staffing and Management Plan” should the chart summarizing roles and the table indicating number of hours be in the narrative or in an appendix? Do the chart and table count as part of the 120 page limit for the technical proposal?

Offerors should provide a summary of the staffing and management plan in the text and include a clearly marked appendix with relevant detailed charts and tables. This appendix should be no more than 10 numbered pages.

9. Would ED consider adding an Executive Summary to the Technical Proposal for Tasks 1–7, as there is an Executive Summary required for the Task 8 proposal? If so, what would be the page limit and would it be in addition to the 120 page limit?

Offerors shall provide an Executive Summary of the Technical Proposal. The Executive Summary shall be no longer than 10 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font. The Executive Summary does not count toward the 120 page limit of the Technical Proposal.

10. Does IES want an Executive Summary as part of the proposal?

Offerors shall provide an Executive Summary of the Technical Proposal. The Executive Summary shall be no longer than 10 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font. The Executive Summary does not count toward the 120 page limit of the Technical Proposal.

11. Can the schedule of deliverables required for each Task be placed in an appendix? The level of detail for the schedule could negatively impact the amount of detail that can be provided in the narrative for each Task, given the 120 page limit.

A schedule of deliverables/milestones by task should be included as Appendix 1.

12. Please confirm that cover sheets, transmittal letters, table of contents, 1-page executive summary (Optional Task 8), and title pages with confidentiality language are not included in the page limits.

These are not included in the page limits.

13. Can IES provide more clarity about the format requirements for documents in supporting appendices? For example, on page 44 the instructions state: "The contractor shall provide two (2) research/evaluation papers or reports (or parts of papers or reports) that reflect the diversity of analytic studies that the contractor has conducted within the last three (3) years. The papers or reports provided should demonstrate the contractor's commitment to quality, rigor, relevance, and usefulness to practitioners. Each paper or report shall not exceed 15 double spaced pages (table of contents, title page, and other introductory pages excluded). If the original document exceeds 15 pages, the offeror shall provide an excerpt that includes relevance, methodology and analysis." What if the sample paper/report has been formatted for publication/dissemination? Should we provide a text only version that is double spaced?

The sample documents may be single spaced. However, single spaced documents may not exceed 8 pages.

14. In addition to the appendices specified in the instructions, are other appendices acceptable for inclusion in the proposal?

The list of approved appendices has been modified (L.9 311-3). The following appendices shall be included:
1. Schedule of Deliverables/Milestones by Task
2. Staffing and management plan, relevant detailed charts and tables up to 10 pages double spaced and double sided.
3. Resumes
4. Relevant corporate experience
5. Responsibility of Prospective Contractor
6. Other appendices as specified by task

15. The front page of the RFP (SF 33) lists an original and 6 copies as required. However, inside the RFP on page 51, it lists original plus 5 copies of the technical and business proposals and original plus 3 copies of the past performance. Which is correct?

    Offerors shall submit the original plus five copies of the technical and business proposals. Offerors shall submit three copies of each past performance report. (Reference Amendment 0001)

<u>Proposal</u>

16. What level of specificity and detail is expected regarding research studies being proposed for Year 1?

As stated in the RFP on page 43, specific detail is required on the strategies, operations, procedures, activities, and deliverables proposed for all tasks for Year 1. In terms of research studies, bidders shall provide, at a minimum, the following information for each proposed study:

- Research questions;
- Research methodology, including data collection (including sampling decisions and strategies for recruiting participants, if appropriate) and analysis techniques;
- Data sources, with discussion, when applicable, of how the bidder intends to access the data sources needed.

As with all activities associated with the tasks of the PWS, the offeror shall provide justification that ensures that the research studies are tightly aligned with explicit, actionable needs of the region.

17. In the "Other Approvals" section of the Performance Work Statement, IT security requirements are set forth. May responses to these requirements be placed in an appendix? It is noted that these requirements are not discussed in the Instructions to Offerors or in the Evaluation Criteria for Technical Proposal.

Contractors and all subcontractors shall comply with the Department of Education's IT Security Policy requirements. As such, an offeror is not required to respond to these requirements in this proposal.

However, in the Business Proposal, Offerors should include a statement that they acknowledge, have read, understand and shall comply with the requirements.

18. Letters of Support – Are they allowable? If so, do they go in the technical proposal? Do they count against the page limit?

General letters of support are not permitted. However, offerors are required to submit letters of interest from at least one potential stakeholder in each proposed research alliance.

19. The instructions request that we provide a percentage of FTE by Task for key personnel. Please confirm what denominator you would like us to use since different firms make different assumptions regarding annual full time equivalent hours.

Offerors shall assume that .50 FTE is the equivalent of 1040 hours worked annually.

<u>Task 2</u>

20. On page 44 of the RFP, instructions for Task 2 supporting appendix state that bidders are to include "Letters of interest from up to 3 potential research alliance participants…." [emphasis added]. The evaluation criteria on page 59 state: "The offeror has provided evidence of interest in each of the proposed Year 1 alliances by providing letters of interest from at least 3 stakeholders…." [emphasis added]. Can IES clarify if we are to

include up to 3 letters from interested stakeholders or at least 3 letters from interested stakeholders?

Offerors shall submit letters of interest from at least one stakeholder but not more than five stakeholders for each of the proposed Year 1 research alliances.

21. RFP Section L.9 Technical Proposal Instructions states under Task 2 "In a supporting appendix, the offeror shall provide the following information for each of the proposed Year 1 research alliances: Letters of interest from up to 3 potential research alliance participants. Are letters of interest required per alliance "up to" 3 or "at least" 3?

Offerors shall submit letters of interest from at least one stakeholder but not more than five stakeholders for each of the proposed Year 1 research alliances.

22. Page 3 of the Performance Work Statement refers to "Large Scale Alliances". Please define Large Scale Alliances in contrast to other research alliances.

The government has deleted the modifier "large scale" on page 3 of the PWS.

23. Regarding letters of interest from stakeholders in an alliance, if multiple (three, for example) stakeholders sign a single letter, does that satisfy the requirement for "letters of interest from at least 3 stakeholders" or are separate letters required from each stakeholder?

Stakeholders in a research alliance should submit separate letters of interest.

Task 3

24. On page 44, under Task 3, in reference to the "supporting appendix exemplars," the RFP states "the document may not have been revised to reflect any comments from IES or its designees." This restriction suggests that current REL contractors cannot submit exemplars that have been approved by IES if they have undergone a comprehensive quality assurance process involving external reviewers selected by IES. Does this restriction mean that all example documents and/or all activities conducted under the current REL contracts in the past 3 years are not admissible as exemplars in supporting appendices? This restriction appears to put current REL contractors at a disadvantage even though they have successfully preformed the type of work requested in this RFP. Is this the intent of this restriction? Can documents submitted to IES before external reviews were conducted be used as exemplars? If a Bridge event was approved by IES without comment from its designated reviewers, can it be used as an example?

The REL program has its own standards and expectations for analytic technical assistance and research and evaluation products. ED believes that exemplars submitted for the purpose of this competition that have already benefitted from guidance and review through the REL program would represent an unfair advantage to the incumbents. Therefore, offerors may not submit documents that reflect any comments from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or its designees under the REL program. This means that first drafts of documents submitted to the REL COR may be used as exemplars. If a document does not exist, the offeror shall provide a sample of a product it would produce if awarded the contract. Each exemplar shall include the following written assurance on the cover sheet of the exemplar: “This document does not reflect any comments from IES or its designees under the REL program.” Exemplar papers or reports shall be no longer than 15 double spaced pages or 8 single spaced pages.

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25. Given that some entities in some regions do not have data systems in place, to what extent is it acceptable to provide technical support for the development and enhancement of existing data systems (some of which might be quite basic or early in their development) which may encompass: identifying key variables for inclusion, refining data collection procedures, and ensuring alignment and linkages between early childhood education, k-12, higher education, and out of school time programs?

It is acceptable to provide technical assistance for the development of new data systems and enhancement of existing data systems. Proposed technical support must be clearly related to the 3-5 topics selected by the REL and the goals of one or more research alliances.

26. Given that some entities in some regions do not have data systems in place, to what extent is it acceptable to purchase equipment as part of the contract to improve institutional structures and reduce technological barriers that states and entities may face in the design, implementation, and use of longitudinal data systems?

Providing equipment to support data systems is not a primary function of the RELs; there are other government programs that support the acquisition of such equipment (for example, State Longitudinal Data Systems program). The REL program will consider proposals to supply equipment to support data systems on a case-by-case basis.

27. On page 7 of the Performance Work Statement, the document states: “At least 85 percent of the resources spend on Tasks 3 and 4 shall be associated with work conducted for specific research alliances. Please provide examples of non-associated activities on which the remaining 15% of resources might be spent.

The remaining 15% of resources may be spent addressing topics other than the 3-5 key topics around which the REL proposes to center its research alliance work over the 5 years. For example, RELS may conduct Bridge events based on What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides or other research, or they may respond to client requests for technical assistance on a wide range of topics.

28. When will IES provide guidelines for the scientific standards being used by the external peer reviewers of workshops and other events, training materials, tools, and other types of products?

The government is in the process of developing the review standards and intends to release them after the contracts are awarded. RELs should assume two rounds of review for these products.

29. Will the customer satisfaction tool be available at the start of this contract? If not, how close to the start of this contract does IES anticipate providing the customer satisfaction tool?

The customer satisfaction tool will be in the development and approval process during the first year of the contract (Task 8). We expect that the tool will be available between 9-12 months after contracts are awarded.

Task 4

30. Are quasi-experimental, correlational, and qualitative methods acceptable for the research and evaluation studies under Task 4?

    As stated in the PWS, offerors shall use the most rigorous and appropriate method of inquiry to respond effectively to research questions identified with or by the research alliances. Offerors shall provide a compelling justification for the methodology they propose. As in all research conducted under the REL contract, the REL shall conduct each study according to high standards and analytic rigor.

31. Since contractors are encouraged to work with LEAs, SEAs, and others to identify, develop, and implement evaluations of new programs and policies, to what extent do Task 4 studies need to be defined in our proposal?

As stated in the RFP on page 43, specific detail is required on the strategies, operations, procedures, activities, and deliverables proposed for all tasks for Year 1. In terms of research studies, bidders shall provide, at a minimum, the following information for each proposed study: Research questions;

- Research methodology, including data collection (including sampling decisions and strategies for recruiting participants, if appropriate) and analysis techniques;
- Data sources, with discussion, when applicable, of how the bidder intends to access the data sources needed.

As with all activities associated with the tasks of the PWS, the offeror shall provide justification that ensures that the research studies are tightly aligned with explicit, actionable needs of the region.

Offerors shall also provide a realistic general study plan for the rest of the contract period that includes expected types and numbers of studies that it will conduct in partnership with the research alliances. However, to allow RELs to be responsive to regional needs on an ongoing basis, RELs shall update proposed activities three months before the end of each contract year in the Updated Annual Plan.

32. Since the Works Clearinghouse (WWC) will not provide a list of current WWC-certified researchers, will IES provide such a list?

IES expects by the time of award to provide a list of researchers who are certified by the WWC to conduct study reviews and are willing to allow their names to be released publicly.

33. For Task 4, would it be appropriate to provide, as an exemplar, a draft of a published document as it existed before it received review or commentary from IES?

First drafts of documents submitted to the REL COR may be used as exemplars. Each exemplar shall include the following written assurance on the cover sheet of the exemplar: “This document does not reflect any comments from IES or its designees under the REL program.” Exemplar papers or reports shall be no longer than 15 double spaced pages or 8 single spaced pages.

34. In section L.9 of the Solicitation Notice, under Task 4 (page 44), the Solicitation Notice states that the contractor shall provide two research/evaluation papers or reports that reflect the diversity of analytic studies that the contractor has conducted within the last three years. Later in that same paragraph, the Solicitation Notice states that “the document may not have been revised to reflect any comments from IES or its designees.” Does this mean that a report produced under the previous REL contract that has been through peer-review (SRO) at IES cannot be submitted in its final form? Should the draft submitted to SRO (prior to review) be submitted?

Offerors may not submit documents that reflect any comments from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or its designees under the REL program. This means that first drafts of documents submitted to the REL COR may be used as exemplars. If a document does not exist, the offeror shall provide a sample of a product it would produce if awarded the contract. Each exemplar shall include the following written assurance on the cover sheet of the exemplar: “This document does not reflect comments from IES or its designees under the REL program.” Exemplar papers or reports shall be no longer than 15 double spaced pages or 8 single spaced pages.

35. The Performance Work Statement states under Task 4 (page 10) that a “systematic review produced by a REL will be reviewed by IES but will not necessarily become a part of the WWC.” On page 14, the PWS states that “While the REL contractor shall publish the evidence review report as a REL product, the approved protocol, study review guides, and systematic review reports will become part of the WWC database.” Please clarify if the reviews will become part of the WWC database.

The relevant sentence on p. 14 of the PWS should read: “The REL contractor shall publish the evidence review report as a REL product, and the approved protocol, study review guides, and systematic review reports may become part of the WWC database.”

36. The Performance Work Statement states under Task 4 (page 11), that “[WWC] reviews may be conducted by the WWC contractor to ensure consistency with WWC procedures.” Please clarify if the REL contractor should budget for conducting the reviews or if these reviews will be the responsibility of the WWC contractor.

The offeror shall budget for conducting their own systematic reviews but should not budget for a WWC review of the quality of the REL’s systematic review.

37. Does the requirement for two employees “certified by the WWC” require certifications in both group design and single-case designs?

Certification is required only in group design, not in single-case design.

38. Will guidelines for appropriate form and content of full project proposals be provided by IES (e.g. what should be included in the “broad plans for analysis”)? If so, when?

As stated in the RFP on page 43, specific detail is required on the strategies, operations, procedures, activities, and deliverables proposed for all tasks for Year 1. In terms of research studies, bidders shall provide, at a minimum, the following information for each proposed study:

- Research questions;
- Research methodology, including data collection (including sampling decisions and strategies for recruiting participants, if appropriate) and analysis techniques;
- Data sources, with discussion, when applicable, of how the bidder intends to access the data sources needed.

As with all activities associated with the tasks of the PWS, the offeror shall provide justification that ensures that the research studies are tightly aligned with explicit, actionable needs of the region.

39. Will a Privacy Act System of Records Notice (SORN) be required for studies using existing data?

A Privacy Act System of Records Notice (SORN) and report to OMB/Congress will be required for data that would enable the identification of individuals.

40. The PWS states that for research or evaluation projects “on topics of national significance” the contractor must prepare restricted use data files and documentation for NCES, whether the data were collected by the REL or not. Is there justification, case-law interpretation, federal statute, or other pertinent information to provide to prospective members of research alliances that outlines how this requirement complies with FERPA or other related statutes beyond what was stated in the PWS?

All data files and documentation will be produced in accordance with applicable law, which may change during the period of performance.

41. The number of key personnel under each task is specified as “up to five.” Under Task 4, If there are more than five proposed studies to be conducted within a given year, how are more than five key personnel to be listed as principal investigators?

All key personnel should be specified, regardless of the number of personnel.

Task 5

42. Related to dissemination activities (Task 5) and collaboration and coordination (Task 6), will each REL have an individual website or will the RELs only website presence be as part of the National Laboratory Network’s one common website?

Regarding Section H.5 – Special Contract Requirements, page 13, will the approved webinars be allowed to be recorded so as to have them "on demand" for posting on the REL websites?

RELs may develop individual websites. However, all material that is posted on a REL's individual website must be approved by the COR.

43. For Task 5 – Dissemination, would it be appropriate to provide, as an exemplar, a draft of a published document as it existed before it received review or commentary from IES?

Offerors may not submit documents that reflect any comments from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) or its designees under the REL program. This means that first drafts of documents submitted to the REL COR may be used as exemplars. If a document does not exist, the offeror shall provide a sample of a product it would produce if awarded the contract. Each exemplar shall include the following written assurance on the cover sheet of the exemplar: "This document does not reflect comments from IES or its designees under the REL program." Exemplar papers or reports shall be no longer than 15 double spaced pages or 8 single spaced pages.

44. Regarding Task 5 on page 60, please provide a definition of "accessible" as included in this section.

    Communicating research and evaluation study findings in a way that is "accessible" means that the dissemination strategies and products are tailored for and responsive to specific audiences' needs and contexts.

45. Will there be a common set of criteria established by IES related to the assessment of the utility of and satisfaction with dissemination activities?

    In coordination with the RELs, especially the REL that is responsible for Task 8, IES will develop a common set of criteria to assess the utility of and satisfaction of customers with dissemination activities. However, since different dissemination strategies and products have different goals, RELs are encouraged to also develop additional ways in which to assess utility and satisfaction of intended audiences.

46. Please confirm that RELs may continue to host Websites for the purposes such as information dissemination and identification of stakeholder needs.

The contractors may develop individual websites. However, all material that is posted on a REL's individual website must be approved by the COR.

Task 7

47. Given the sub-task structure of Task 7 and the nature of the Task 7 work as conveyed in the Performance Work Statement, is a Year 1 work plan expected for Task 7 as is required for Tasks 1-6?

Offerors shall provide specific and detailed plans for Year 1 for each of the subtasks in Task 7.

48. Task 7 is the only task that includes several numbered subtasks. Please confirm that it is correct to assume that the price for Task 7 is to be provided at the Task level, as it is for Tasks 1-6, and not at the subtask level.

For Task 7, please provide summary information at the Task level and provide additional supporting information in a separate schedule showing the prices at the subtask level.
The Task 7 deliverables must be included in the deliverables and pricing schedules too.

Task 8

49. Is Task 8 considered to be a part of the overall REL contract or will it be considered a separate contract?

It will not be a separate contract. The REL contractor selected to be the coordinating entity will have 8 tasks.

Will the small business requirements for the Task 8 proposal be cumulative with the subcontracting plan set provided in offerors proposal for Tasks 1 - 7 (see page 45)?

Offerors who choose to bid on Task 8 should provide a cumulative subcontracting plan for their Task 8 proposal.

50. The Instructions indicate: “Technical proposals for Optional Task 8 shall be no more than 25 pages excluding small business plan and appendices, double-sided, double spaced with a 12-point font size, and margins of at least 1 inch” Will ED clarify if “25 pages” means 25 numbered pages or 25 sheets of paper double-sided which would be 50 pages of material?

“25 pages” means 25 numbered pages double-sided and double spaced.

51. The coordinating contractor shall have primary responsibility for developing a customer satisfaction instrument that can be used by all 10 REL contractors to collect information on their technical assistance and dissemination events and for assessing satisfaction with REL products.” Is this instrument to be an online instrument that is a full separate data collection or should it be designed as a pop up screen that is typically used on websites?

There is no requirement for a specific type of online customer satisfaction instrument. However, the customer satisfaction instrument shall be designed in a way that it may be effectively used in a variety of situations. At a minimum, the instrument should be able to be easily administered at face-to-face meetings and online. In both cases, the instrument should be developed in a way that allows for the data of both types of surveys (paper and online) to produce output in a uniform presentation to enable comparable analyses.

52. How long should we anticipate the OMB approval process will take once the package is submitted to OMB?

For a customer survey, the official timeframe for OMB is 10 business days (from the date of OMB submittal).

53. Are there analytical reports based on the survey responses that are part of the requirements of this task? If so, when are they due?

Analytic reports are not required but may be proposed. The REL contractor selected to be the coordinating entity shall provide basic tabulations for each question on customer satisfaction surveys and may be asked to combine some surveys, when appropriate and useful to do so. The data from each survey should, at a minimum, be readable in Excel format.

54. Is there a target sample size of respondents that is required?

OMB requires a response rate of no less than 75%, although a higher response rate is desirable.

55. Is the intranet development obligated to follow all of the IES web standards? If so can you please supply a copy of the most recent IES web standards, policies and procedures?

Yes, intranet development is obligated to follow IES web standards. The IES web standards, policies and procedures are being updated and will be available upon award.

56. Who will have access to the intranet? All REL personnel? All IES personnel? Should it be designed with login credentials?

The intranet shall be accessible to the IES REL team, REL directors and their designated staff, and when appropriate, to subcontractors of RELs and IES. The intranet should be designed with login credentials.

57. Do we need to provide a past performance report for Task 8?

Yes, please follow the proposal instructions requesting 3 copies of the past performance report. Offerors may use the past performance report submitted for Tasks 1-7.

58. Please clarify the submission requirements for Task 8 proposal, i.e. How many copies of the technical, business proposals for Task 8 are required? Do we need to provide electronic copies of Task 8 as well?

The submission requirements for the Task 8 proposal are the same as the requirements for the proposals addressing Tasks 1-7.

59. Please confirm that the responsibility of the Optional Task 8 contractor is to design the customer satisfaction survey and prepare the OMB clearance package, but NOT to implement the survey.

Each REL shall administer its customer satisfaction surveys. However, the Task 8 contractor will be responsible for providing the data output in (at a minimum) an Excel format, as well as provide simple tabulations of each survey item to the relevant REL and to IES.

Section K:

60. Does IES have any guidance for Offerors about fee for the Firm Fixed Price (FFP) contract?

It is in the Government's interest to offer contractors opportunities for financial rewards sufficient to stimulate efficient contract performance, attract the best capabilities of qualified large and small business concerns to Government contracts, and maintain a viable industrial base. Offerors should keep in mind their need to cover their estimated costs for performance, earning a profit and ensuring their business proposal is competitively priced. The Department will be awarding these contracts based on best value which includes both technical and price as factors.

61. Provided they meet the maximum revenue and employment criteria for this procurement as specified on page 27, section K.4 (52.204-8) - Annual Representations and Certifications, is a non-profit organization considered a small business and thus able to contribute to obtaining the Small Business Subcontracting points of up to 20 points?

According to SBA's size standard office a non-profit business cannot be considered a small business. It has to be a profit making entity. The non-profit can, however, be considered a large business.

62. For the separate Task 8 proposal, does the offeror need to provide SF 33 and Section K certifications in addition to the Conflict of Interest and Small Business Subcontracting Plan?

Yes, offerors should provide a separate stand-alone proposal for Task 8.

Section L:

63. On pages 41-42 (L. 8., 311-2a), what is meant by "level of effort" and what are the units for the numbers provided at the top of page 42?

Offerors shall assume that .50 FTE (full-time equivalent) is the equivalent of 1040 hours worked annually.

64. In Section L.8 of the Solicitation Notice (pages 41-42), is it correct to interpret the estimated levels of effort as being described in hours? (If not, what is the unit used to describe the estimated levels of effort?)

Yes, the level of effort is described in hours.

65. If a contractor's capitalization policy is greater than the $1,000 as listed in section 311-4a – Business Proposal Instructions, but less than the FAR limit of $5,000, can a contractor submit purchases in accordance with its internal policy?

Contractors should submit the information with their business proposal as requested in section 311-4a for any purchases above $1,000. Requests to purchase equipment will be reviewed on a case by case basis. The technical proposal should discuss the need for any purchases but should not provide pricing information. Please provide pricing information in the business proposal. The offeror should provide an explanation for the need to purchase equipment in both the technical and business proposal.

66. RFP Section L.9 Technical Proposal Instructions in the first paragraph states “The technical proposal must include a list of names and proposed duties of the professional personnel, consultants, and key subcontractors assigned to the project.” The remaining subsections within Section L.9 of the RFP specify information for key personnel to be provided with the discussion of each task and in an appendix, but not for “professional” personnel”. Should the reference to “professional personnel” in the first paragraph under L.9 be changed to “key personnel” or is there a requirement for the offeror to describe the qualifications of non-key “professional personnel” who may work on the contract? If the latter, where should this information be provided?

All key personnel should be specified, regardless of the number of personnel. Offerors should include this information in their technical proposal (Staffing and Management Plan); and the business proposal.

67. RFP Section L.10 Business Proposal Instructions states “The offeror(s) business proposal must contain the following information…E. Responsibility of Prospective Contractor…(2) the offeror’s capability to meet delivery or performance schedules; (3) the offeror’s record of past performance, including a listing of references with contract and grant numbers and the addresses and phone numbers of those with whom the offeror has most recently conducted business;” This information will have already been provided in the Technical Proposal and Past Performance Report, respectively, and seems redundant here. Should these clauses be deleted?

No, the clauses should not be deleted. The business proposal should contain necessary information and explanations that are requested in the instructions because it will be reviewed separately.

68. RFP Section L.10 Business Proposal Instructions states “The offeror(s) business proposal must contain the following information…E. Responsibility of Prospective Contractor…(5) the offeror’s possession of necessary organizational experience, technical skills or the ability to obtain them; (6) the offeror’s possession of necessary facilities; or the ability to obtain them;” This information will have already been provided in the Technical Proposal and Past Performance Report and seems redundant here. Should these clauses be deleted?

No, the clauses should not be deleted. The business proposal should contain necessary information and explanations that are requested in the instructions because it will be reviewed separately.

69. On page 47 of 61, Section L.10, Item E., the offeror, as part of the business proposal, is asked to provide categorical descriptions and statements to establish a number of things. A number of the items listed, such as past performance and organizational experience and technical skills are asked for elsewhere in the instructions. At the end of the section the instructions indicate "these descriptions and statement should also be incorporated in the technical proposal…" It is not clear whether the statement refers to the immediately preceding Conflict of Interest Plan or something else.

Yes, the descriptions and statements refers to L. 10 Business Proposal Instructions, E. 1-8 plus F. Offerors shall include this information as Appendix #5—Responsibility of Prospective Contractors with the technical proposal which will not be counted as part of the technical proposal page count. Offerors should use the same format as specified in the proposal instructions.

70. On page 47 of section L.10 Business Proposal Instructions, regarding the statement "these descriptions and statements should also be incorporated in the Technical Proposal, as conducive of separate examination by the technical evaluators during the process of technical evaluation." will ED please note the specific descriptions and statements to be incorporated? Also, can these be placed in an appendix of the Technical Proposal?

Yes, the descriptions and statements refers to L. 10 Business Proposal Instructions, E. 1-8 plus F. Offerors shall include this information as Appendix #5—Responsibility of Prospective Contractors with the technical proposal which will not be counted as part of the technical proposal page count. Offerors should use the same format as specified in the proposal instructions.

71. Please clarify what is intended to be submitted with respect to the enumerated items L.10. E. 1-8, in which volume of the proposal, and in what format. If all this information is to be included in the Technical Proposal as well as the Business Proposal, please indicate what is included in the page count and what is not.

Yes, the descriptions and statements refers to L. 10 Business Proposal Instructions, E. 1-8 plus F. Offerors shall include this information as Appendix #5—Responsibility of Prospective Contractors with the technical proposal which will not be counted as part of the technical proposal page count. Offerors should use the same format as specified in the proposal instructions.

72. In our experience, additional questions often arise throughout the proposal effort. Would the Government consider a second round of questions and answers beyond May 18?

Additional questions will be reviewed however a second round of questions is not planned.

73. Please clarify what is meant by "invitational travel" as stated in Footnote 3 on p. 7 and in Footnote 5 on p. 15 of the Performance Work Statement.

Invitational travel is travel paid in part or whole by Government funds for persons other than ED employees, serving without pay or at $1.00 a year. Invitational travel is not authorized under this RFP or subsequent contracts. REL funding shall not be used to pay for travel or meal expenses to recipients of REL services. Alliance members will need to pay for their participation in meetings.

Meals for contract required meetings shall not exceed per diem (including tax and gratuities) and are to be provided in lieu of per diem. Federal and contract employees, as well as any other non-traveling participants shall pay for their own meals.

74. Regarding Section L.14 314-1 Past Performance Report (Page 49 of RFP) – please confirm if offeror is required to provide four relevant past performance references. Section L.15 - Additional Past Performance Instructions states that the offeror shall provide three relevant past performance references. Please confirm the number of past performance references offeror is required to provide.

Offerors shall provide three relevant past performance references using Attachment F-- Past Performance Information form. The prime contractor shall provide three Past Performance references (using the form) and key subcontractors shall provide 3 Past Performance references using the form.

75. One part of the RFP asks for 4 past performance (L. 14. 314-1, pg 49) and then on page 51, asks for 3 past performance (L.15, #2).

Offerors shall provide three relevant past performance references using Attachment F-- Past Performance Information form. The prime contractor shall provide three Past Performance references (using the form) and key subcontractors shall provide 3 Past Performance references using the form.

76. Both sections L.14 and L.15 request Past Performance Information. Part A of Section L.14 asks for four most recent contracts, completed in the last 3 years or currently in progress. Part 2 of Section L. 15 asks for three relevant past performance references of similar size and scope. Further, Part E of section L.14 requires references to complete the Contractor Performance Information form and Part 2 of Section L.15 references a Vendor Past Performance form. Please clarify the requirements: number of past performance references and which information form.

Offerors shall provide three relevant past performance references using Attachment F-- Past Performance Information form. The prime contractor shall provide three Past Performance references (using the form) and key subcontractors shall provide 3 Past Performance references using the form. Past Performance Information form and Contractor Performance Information form are both referencing the same from (Attachment F) of the RFP.

77. Please clarify the difference between the 4 references required in the Past Performance report – (Page 49 of 61, L.14 314-1) and the 3 relevant past performance references required in L.15 , 2 Page 51 of 61

Offerors shall provide three relevant past performance references using Attachment F-- Past Performance Information form. The prime contractor shall provide three Past Performance references (using the form) and key subcontractors shall provide 3 Past Performance references using the form.

78. The funding package for the REL competition lists two different addresses for proposal submission. The Solicitation, Offer and Award (Standard Form 33), in Box 8, states, "Address Offer to: Contracts & Acquisitions Mgt., Group D, US Dept of Education, 550 12th St SW - 7th Floor, Washington DC 20202-4230." The RFP (p.51 of 62) states that proposals must be submitted to: "U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Attn: Sharon Masciana, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Room 7129, Washington, DC 2020-4230."Please verify the correct address for submitting the proposal by U.S. mail or courier service.

Please address all packages to:

U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Contracts and Acquisitions Management
LBJ Building, 400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202-4230
Attention: Sharon Masciana, Contract Specialist

Important Note:

All offerors should be aware that packages sent to the U.S. Department of Education through FEDEX, UPS, the U.S. Post Office, or hand-carried will no longer be accepted by the point of contact in the Contracts and Acquisitions Management office (i.e. Sharon Masciana, Contract Specialist). All packages must go through the Department's Mail Room located at the Lyndon B. Johnson Building (LBJ), 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room BC102, Washington, DC 20202.

Contact information: Mail Room Phone number: 202-401-0969
Hours: 7:00 am to 5:00 pm

IN ADDITION, ED recommends that the delivery person provide and or obtain a receipt for your proposal that gives the date and time the proposal entered the Federal facility and was accepted.

Reference FAR CLAUSE 52.215-1 for further information regarding late proposals. Offerors should note that late proposals cannot be accepted. Therefore, please carefully plan the delivery of your proposal (hard and electronic copies) so that it is **received prior to the due date of 2:00 pm EDT on June 29, 2011**. Proposals may be delivered to the location above a day ahead of this schedule to ensure proposal delivery is not late.

79. Section L.16 311-2 (Additional General Instructions to Offerors) Page 52 of 61 of the solicitation indicates "if the offeror submits proposals for more than one REL contract, the offeror needs to state this in each proposal and make it clear how the offeror would manage the workload" – does this hold if the offeror is part of other proposals as a

subcontractor? Where should this information should be provided in the technical proposal?

Offerors shall submit a statement in the prime's proposal in both the Technical and Business proposal. In this statement, the offeror shall identify which regions they are submitting a proposal for. The offeror shall discuss how it plans to manage the workload of more than one region.

Similar information for proposed subcontracts is not requested.

80. Section L.16 311-2 (Additional General Instructions to Offerors) Page 52 of 61 provides information for headers to be included in each proposal page. Is this header information valid for documents provided in the Appendix as well? Especially for documents that may be pdf reports from previous work?

Offerors must clearly mark the proposal information. If necessary, the appendix can include a cover sheet with the header that identifies the proposal.

81. Regarding electronic submission of the proposal, does ED have a file size restriction? Is there a preference for file type and software version (e.g., Microsoft® 2007, PDF)?

The Department of Education can accommodate a total file size of 30 MB (to include email message and all attachments). The Department uses Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Adobe Reader 9.

82. The requirements found throughout the RFP indicate a variety of information is to be provided in the Business Proposal. May we submit our proposed budget as an Excel Workbook and provide the remaining business proposal information (SF33, subcontracting plan, reps & certs, etc.) in Word or PDF?

Yes.

83. RFP Section L.17 Additional Business Proposal Instructions, Business Proposal for Optional Task 8 states "Offerors shall submit two types of proposed price spreadsheets, including:" Total proposed price for Optional Task 8 evenly distributed across each of the five years of the contract, representing the expected incremental amount the contractor will receive from ED each year. The realistic proposed price by task and overall Year 1. These proposed prices shall be consistent with the detailed Year 1 work plan the contractor must provide as part of the technical proposal In addition, the Offeror shall include a separate price proposal to support an option to extend services by six months for the period of performance from January 3, 2017 to June 2, 2017."Should the opening sentence read "Offerors shall submit three types of proposed price spreadsheets, including:" If not, please clarify.

Corrections to this language can be found in Amendment 0001 to the RFP.

84. The requirements for the Business Proposal state that costs must be budgeted at the deliverable level. Does this refer to the deliverables as stated at the end of each respective

Task section in Attachment A – Performance Work Statement? Additionally, will costs be required to be budgeted and reported on at a project level (e.g., research studies, Alliance activities, dissemination activities)?

The Schedule of Deliverables is Section V of the PWS.

Yes, costs are required to be reported on the project level. Please note ED stated in the Instructions to Offerors: Offerors may include interim deliverables as appropriate. See Attachment C – Pricing Schedule which is included for your convenience and uses Section V. Deliverables/Milestones by Task for a potential Pricing Schedule/Deliverable Payments. Offerors may also provide supporting information at the project level.

85. Can IES provide more guidance about the "supporting information" (page 53 of the RFP) the Offeror should provide to document the price build up by year? Is there a specific format we should use?

A sample template is provided for Spreadsheet #2.

86. What is the government's definition of invitational travel on Page 53 of the RFP related usage of REL funds for food or travel?

Invitational travel is travel paid in part or whole by Government funds for persons other than ED employees, serving without pay or at $1.00 a year. Invitational travel is not authorized under this RFP or subsequent contracts. REL funding shall not be used to pay for travel or meal expenses to recipients of REL services. Alliance members will need to pay for their participation in meetings.

Meals for contract required meetings shall not exceed per diem (including tax and gratuities) and are to be provided in lieu of per diem. Federal and contract employees, as well as any other non-traveling participants shall pay for their own meals.

87. The RFP indicates that offerors are to submit three types of business spreadsheets. Please confirm if spreadsheet 1 mentioned on page 54 of 61 is the same as the spreadsheet requested on page 53 of 61? If not the same, please provide additional information about what is required for each.

Four spreadsheets are needed as follows:

<u>Spreadsheet #1</u> -- The price for each task and a total for the 60 months of the contract. Please use Template #1 to provide this summary information.

<u>Spreadsheet #2</u> -- Total proposed price for each task evenly distributed across each of the five years of the contract, representing the expected incremental amount the contractor will receive from ED each year. Please use Template #2 to provide a price build up.

<u>Spreadsheet #3</u> is a variation of spreadsheet #2 and should encompass only realistic prices for Year 1 task work. Along with the Year 1 budget, the offeror shall include a list of each Year 1

deliverable and a proposed payment amount for each fixed price deliverable such that the total payment for all deliverables equals the proposed Year 1 budget. Offerors shall propose a Pricing and Payment Schedule based on the price of each Year 1 deliverable but may propose apportioning the price of some deliverables over time in order to receive payment on a more regular basis. Such apportionment must be accompanied by a valid interim deliverable that demonstrates successful progress towards completion of the deliverable.

Spreadsheet #4 is for an Optional Period at the end of contract only and will be awarded by the government if needed. The offeror should provide a price for a six month period of time by task.

Note: Please refer to Amendment 0001 which revised instructions to offerors to renumber the spreadsheet information and number of required copies.

Attachment: Sample Templates

88. At the bottom of page 53, offerors are reminded to allocate not less than 25% of their budget from Tasks 1-5 to rural areas. Please provide guidance as to how the contractor is to demonstrate this in the Business Proposal.

Offerors should indicate how they plan to address the issues of rural areas in the technical proposal and in the business proposal address the amount of their budget that will be used to accomplish these goals.

89. Since costs of travel vary significantly over time and these costs impact the availability of funds for labor and other direct costs like meeting facilities, what assumptions should offerors make with respect to travel? Will the Department consider reimbursing travel based on actual costs rather than including travel within specific firm fixed price deliverables?

ED will consider reimbursement for travel costs based on actual costs provided the offeror justifies using this method.

90. How does the information in spreadsheet 2 on page 54 of 61 – proposed price by task and overall for Year One -- differ from what is provided for Year 1 in the spreadsheet 1? If you have preferred templates, please provide copies.

Spreadsheet #1 -- The price for each task and a total for the 60 months of the contract. Please use Template #1 to provide this summary information.

Spreadsheet #2 -- Total proposed price for each task evenly distributed across each of the five years of the contract, representing the expected incremental amount the contractor will receive from ED each year. Please use Template #2 to provide a price build up.

91. On page 54 the RFP states: ED’s current subcontracting small business goals are as follows: Small Business (SB): 37.3%; Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB): 5%; Women Owned Small Business (WOSB): 5%; Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone): 3%; Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB): 3%.The categories listed above imply no order of preference. The goals are a percentage of total subcontract dollars. Do these percentages represent the minimum requirements—that is, each REL must subcontract 37.3% to SB, 5% to SDB, 5% to WOSB, 3% to HUBZone, and 3% to SDVOSB? Or do these percentages represent recommended targets?

These goals represent ED’s recommended targets. However, offerors will need to submit an explanation in their subcontracting plan when they are not able to meet the subcategory goals.

92. Is there a required minimum for subcontracts with small business either as a total of subcontract dollars or total contract award?

There is no required minimum. Please see the RFP which states that the small business percentages are a % of the total subcontracting plan dollars.

93. Regarding the statement on page 54 of the RFP “Offerors shall propose apportioning the price of some deliverables over time in order to receive payment on a more regular basis”, would Earned Value Management (EVM) be an acceptable method to measure the costs for interim performance based on earned project value?

Offerors may track their costs through their own internal mechanism which may include EVM.

94. The RFP requests “supporting information documenting their price build up by year” (pg.54) for the prime contractor and subcontractors. What information, if any, in addition to price, by task by year is the Department requesting for analysis?

This information is provided in Spreadsheet #2. Please see Template #2.

95. Page 54 of 61: The RFP asks for “a list of Year 1 deliverables and a proposed payment amount (as required in number 3 above.)” We assume that the sentence should have referenced “number 2 above”. Please confirm.

Amendment Number 0001 corrected this.

96. Is a separate small business subcontracting plan required for Optional Task 8? If so, what is the maximum number of points to be earned?

Yes, the maximum number of points to be earned is 20 points.

The following instructions are added to the Task 8 business proposal instructions:

Small business subcontracting plan. Large offerors must submit a small business-subcontracting plan, in accordance with 48 CFR, 19.702 Statutory Requirements.

ED's current subcontracting small business goals are as follows:

Small Business (SB): 37.3%
Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB): 5%
Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB): 5%
Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone): 3%
Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB): 3%

The categories listed above imply no order of preference. The goals are a percentage of total subcontract dollars.

ED values an approach where technical, analytic, or significant services is performed by a small business. See Evaluation Criteria for further information.

In its proposed small business subcontracting plan, the offeror shall state the type of work to be performed by a small business and the percentage of work proposed to be performed by a small business. The offeror shall also state the name of the small business and type of small business concern. Offerors shall submit a summary page with all subcontractors listed by total subcontracting dollars and percentages of subcontracting dollars.

<u>Section M</u>

97. Concerning past performance, we have a contract from Entity #1 to do work for Entity #2. The sponsor of record (Entity #1) can only attest to our work from what Entity #2 provides. We think Entity #2 should complete and sign the Contractor Performance Information form (Attachment F), but want to make sure that Ed would agree.

    Response: The entity responsible for reviewing performance should provide the performance review and be clear about the relationships. For additional information see L. 14 314-1 Past Performance Report.

98. May the past performance ratings referred to on pages 57-61 include those for grants from various sources or are they limited to contracts only?

    Response: ED is looking for contract performance reviews primarily. However, if an organization does not have recent contract performance reviews, it may be necessary to provide past performance for grants recently completed. On page 49, under L.14 -- A. The clause states that offerors shall submit information for contracts completed in the last three years or currently in process, which are of similar size, scope, complexity or, in any way are relevant to the effort required by this solicitation.

99. Can IES provide more clarity on how the subcontracting plan will be reviewed and scored (page 61)? For example, how might an offeror be awarded 5 out of 20 points or 10 out of 20 points.

The small business subcontracting plan evaluation criterion is being changed as follows:

The subcontracting plan for Tasks 1-7 will be reviewed separately from the Technical Proposal using a 20 point scale. The points earned will be added to the total technical score.

This evaluation criterion will also be applied to the Offeror's subcontracting plan for Task 8. The points earned will be added to the total technical score.

Small Business Subcontracting (up to 20 points)

The subcontracting plan will be reviewed separately from the Technical Proposal using a 20 point scale. The points earned will be added to the total technical score.

Small Business Subcontracting (up to 20 points)

1. Demonstrates integration of small businesses into a significant portion of the project as evidenced by the small business plan; small business plans that meet or exceed the minimum of 37.3% of subcontract dollars awarded to small business may earn up to 20 points.

   The U.S. Department of Education's metrics for reviewing the small business subcontracting plan are as follows:

   0 to 10 points may be earned for subcontracting plans that meet or exceed ED's goals of providing between 37.3% to 44% of dollars to small businesses.
   11 to 15 points may be earned for subcontracting plans that exceed ED's goals by providing between 45% to 50% of dollars to small businesses.
   16 to 20 points may be earned for subcontracting plans that exceed ED's goals by providing 51% or more of dollars to small businesses.

   Please remember ED's goals are based on a percentage of total subcontracting dollars.

2. Small Businesses that submit a proposal as the prime contractor may earn up to 20 points for this factor.

100. On page 61, can IES explain the difference between the review/evaluation/scoring of the subcontracting plan and the "Corporate Commitment to Small Business Contracting"? Is the Corporate Commitment to Small Business Contracting represented and scored based upon the company's current and existing subcontracting with small businesses?

Yes, the Corporate Commitment to Small Business Contracting will be evaluated based upon offeror's current and existing subcontracts with small businesses.